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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

SOLILOQUIES IN ENGLAND AND LATER SOLILOQUIES. By George Santayana. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Mr. Santayana's intellectual reveries, though they partake of the monotony of all reverie, and though one misses in them the clear-cut revelatory analysis characteristic of more purposeful thinking,—a virtue of which this writer is eminently capable,—are fascinating and by no means otiose. A peculiarly refined sense of the relativity of all things pervades them, finding outlet sometimes in an elaborately expressed sympathy with human aspirations and failures, sometimes in harshly oracular sayings. One seems to find here the romance of a disillusioned mind, the poetry of an early Greek philosopher, the religion of a skeptic.

"Existence," says the author, "being a perpetual generation, involves aspiration, and its aspiration envelops it in an atmosphere of light, the joy and the beauty of being, which is the living heaven; but for the same reason existence in its texture involves a perpetual and living hell—the conflict and mutual hatred of its parts, each endeavoring to devour its neighbor's substance in the vain effort to live forever."

Few things more vague and at the same time more suggestive have ever been said about life—and the book is full of such things. But it is useless to expect greater explicitness from Mr. Santayana. He refuses to draw out his analogies, to define his categories—in short, to philosophize. He is as much attached as an ancient Greek to the language of common sense: what that does not make clear, he scarcely attempts to elucidate; all must be expressed in terms of feeling, sentiment, our human sense of values.

Mankind learns nothing by experience! Otherwise, "how different our politics and our morals would be, how clear, how tolerant, how steady! If we knew ourselves, our conduct would be absolutely decided and consistent; and a pervasive sense of vanity and humor would disinfect all our passions, if we knew the world. As it is, we live experimentally, moodily, in the dark." So living, what is our best attitude? Apparently—if we may attribute any conclusion so definite to Mr. Santayana—one's ambition should be to dream without being deluded. There is a way of escape through dreams and aspirations, provided these be not taken too absolutely; there is also a way of escape through the acceptance of pain and death. This is the fundamental truth in Christianity, the meaning of the Cross as a symbol. "Death is the background of life, much as empty space is that of the stars; it is a deeper thing always lying behind, like the black sky beyond the blue. . . . Since birth and death actually occur, and our brief career is surrounded by

vacancy, it is far better to live in the light of the tragic fact, rather than to forget or deny it, and build everything on a fundamental lie."

In all this, and in Mr. Santayana's volume as a whole, there is perhaps more originality of expression and vitality of imagery than there is novelty in those points of view which can be, so to speak, isolated and defined. The fact is that the interest of the book depends almost entirely upon one thing: the author is able to poetize his sense of life, to cast a glow of something like romance—of mysterious interest, at least—even over our fundamental difficulties, our insoluble perplexities. Without being soft or unmanly, without ever writing in a purely *compensatory* or consolatory strain, without assuming any heroic postures, or pretending to reveal any secrets, he does shed upon things lights that may enable one to receive reality as interesting, beautiful, desirable. His mission appears to be to help certain minds to "accept the universe". His may be the poetry (or philosophy) of a decadent age; but it functions truly, nevertheless, as poetry (or philosophy), and of its age it is, despite its uniqueness of form and style, a singularly typical as well as eloquent expression.

LORDS AND COMMONERS. By Sir Henry Lucy. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company.

Though *Lords and Commoners* is a book of excellent gossip well seasoned with common sense and with humor, it scarcely equals in interest Sir Henry Lucy's *Men and Measures in Parliament* republished last autumn.

Disraeli and Gladstone are important figures in the new work as in the old, and indeed, with the exception of Winston Churchill, they alone are portrayed with any fulness. But there appears to have been little to add to what the author had already said about them, and the chapter devoted to Churchill, though it does pretty well as a familiar portrait, seems in no way remarkable.

In the long run, what interests the reader—especially the rather remote American reader—in a work of this sort, is character. In *Men and Measures* Sir Henry abounded in thumbnail sketches and in brief, able analyses of personalities little and big. The result was that even one not greatly interested in the details of British politics could scarcely be contented to lay the book down before finishing it. In the present work the author runs more largely to discussions of Parliamentary oratory and Parliamentary humor—somewhat technical matters, these—to anecdotes of a slightly recondite sort, and to general comment. An entire chapter is devoted to "Bulls in the (Westminster) China Shop", of which verbal improprieties the author presents a fine list, with the zest of a connoisseur. But, after all, mixed metaphors offer no great variety of entertainment.

The final word to be said of this book of Sir Henry's is, however, that, like its predecessor, it possesses charm. It was Sir Henry who invented and fastened upon Lord Hartington (later Duke of Devonshire) the story that the